Administration and Trade in the Akwamu Empire, 1681–1730

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The small inland kingdom of Akwamu, with its capital at Nyanaoase, had become, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the dominant political and military power on the eastern Gold Coast and the western Slave Coast. The authority of the Nyanaoase government extended along the coast for a distance of over 200 miles -- from the Agona state in the west to the borders of the Whydah kingdom in the east (see Figure 1). In the interior, Nyanaoase rule was manifest over a broad area stretching 100 or more miles behind the seaboard. The military and political power of the state was broken in 1730. In that year, following a series of internal revolts, a coalition of invading armies from the northwest and west destroyed Nyanaoase and occupied all of the western part of the empire. A reconstituted, but smaller, state, with its capital at Akwamufie, was founded on the eastern bank of the Volta in the early 1730's. The new Akwamu kingdom was unable, however, to recreate the old imperial order (Wilks 1957).

This study will focus on the period between 1681 and 1730 and will be concerned with two aspects of imperial administration: first, the control and management of the state's external trade, the commercial order, and second, the control and management of the dependent territories, the imperial or tribute order. I hope to show the complexity of the Akwamu social formation and to demonstrate that its social-historical evolution cannot be reduced to a "response" to the European "impact" or to the guns-slaves-guns syndrome. Since the founding of Nyanaoase in the late

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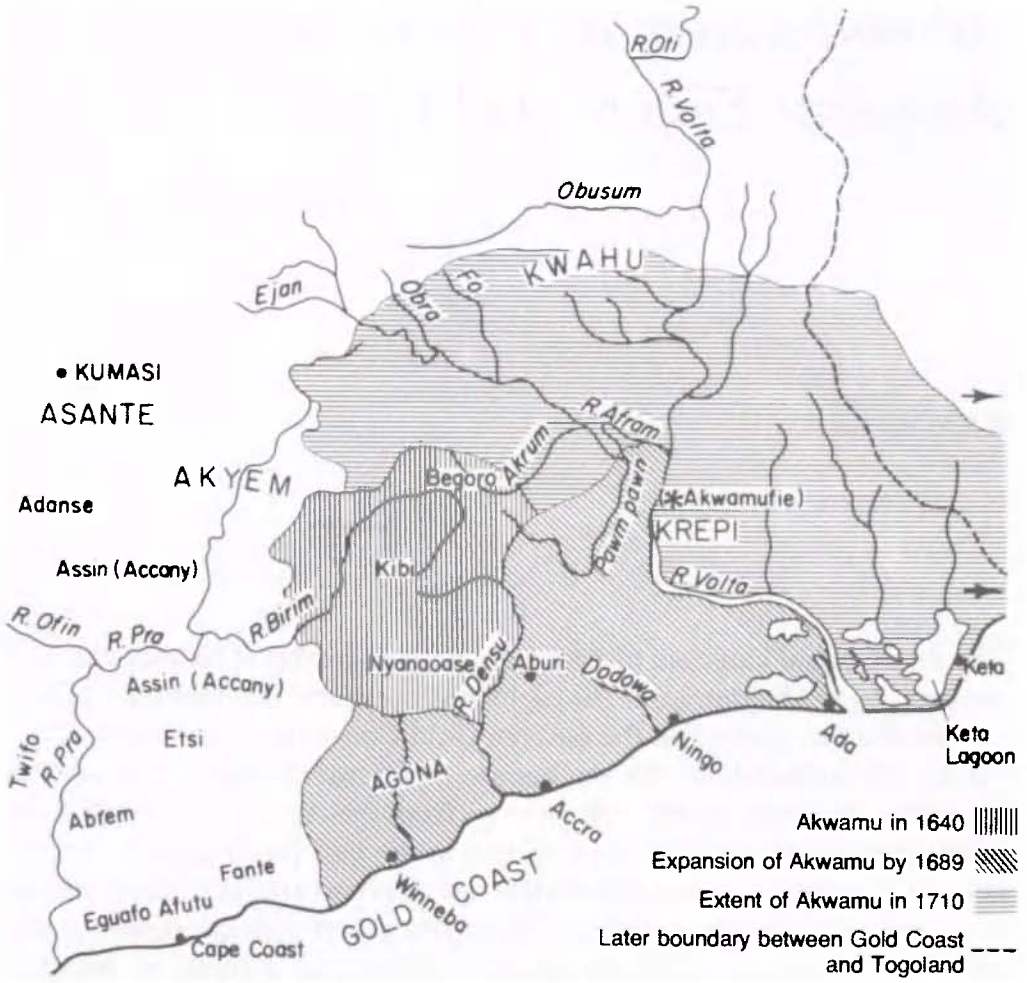

Figure 1. The empire of Akwamu

sixteenth century, long-distance trade had been a vital sector of the Akwamu economy and a major source of revenue for the rulers of the state. An Akwamu tradition current in the early eighteenth century may be interpreted to show that the commercial and military organization and resources of the founders of the state provided sufficient conditions for the kingdom's later territorial expansion (Rask 1754:151–152). Other evidence suggests that the Akwamu kingdom of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may be termed a trade state within which a single ruling class (consolidated out of principally two social groups, professional merchants and soldiers) derived the greater proportion of its revenues from commerce: the regulation of the Abonse market, the control of commodity circulation, the taxation of trade, and price fixing (Wilks 1971:365–369; also Djan 1936:131–132; Kea 1974:156–172).

The early Akwamu kingdom was centered on Nyanaoase and its environs. This was the place where the "proper Akwamu" lived; its size was such that the king "could have summoned his nobles with a cannon shot whenever he wanted to hold counsel with them" (Rømer 1760:120). The

small inland trade state had developed into a different type of political system by 1670. D'Elbée (1671:381, translation mine) gives a brief account of what I assume to be the Akwamu state and its political influence east of the Volta:

> The King of these countries [between the Volta and Little Popo] has a lot of land and *grand politique*; he devotes himself to nothing but the settling of disputes and lawsuits among his people, since his neighbors dare not wage war against him because of his strength. He is said to field an army of 500,000, and the town where he lives is more populous and larger than Paris.

While part of D'Elbée's account is clearly exaggerated, it nevertheless draws attention to the scale of Akwamu political development since the late sixteenth century.

Between 1681 and 1702, the Nyanaoase government gained undisputed control of the ports on the eastern Gold and western Slave Coasts. Among the residents of these ports were the agents of the Danish, Dutch, and English trading companies, each of which maintained several mercantile establishments along the Akwamu-dominated coast. Through its coastal marts, the Akwamu state was linked to the overseas markets of western Europe and the Americas. The ports served as major import-export centers for the commodities distributed by the Akwamu commercial network, and, in consequence, the Nyanaoase government imposed on them, particularly the Accra ports, stringent controls.

The European overseas trade represented one aspect of the commodity relations of the Akwamu state.[1] The latter was also an integral part of a land-based commercial network, a geographically extensive exchange system that embraced the gold-producing districts to the northwest (e.g., those of Akyem), the social-economic formations of the Ardra and Whydah kingdoms to the east, and those of the Guinea savanna states of Dagbon (Dagomba) and Gonja to the north. Merchandise imported through the Akwamu ports was redistributed to the market centers of these places, and they, in turn, channelled their commodity exports through the Akwamu ports. The Nyanaoase government supervised commodity relations between Akwamu and its neighbors.

Wealth distribution within the Akwamu state was articulated in two distinct forms. Commodity circulation, in which the movement of merchandise was determined by commercial transactions, constituted one form. The second entailed the appropriation of the surplus product (labor) as corvée, tax, tribute, fines, etc., to support the ruling class and the central government administration. This mode of wealth distribution was determined by the administrative-political structure of the state, not by commercial operations. Thus, in the later seventeenth century and the

[1] For a careful theoretical discussion of the concepts used in this study — surplus product, social formation, commodity relations, etc. — see Hindess and Hirst (1975).

early eighteenth century, there existed wealth distribution based on commercial determinants and wealth distribution based on political determinants. While structurally distinct, the two forms were not wholly independent of one another. The development of the state's external trade was directly related to the level of surplus appropriation within the empire and the extent to which the ruling class utilized this surplus as merchant capital. If the Akwamu state of the late sixteenth century was a trade state in which internal wealth distribution was based in large measure on commercial determinants, the Akwamu polity of the late seventeenth century was a tribute state in which political conditions regulated this distribution. The first section of this study will examine certain aspects of these political conditions; the second section will consider commerce and its management within the state.

AKWAMU POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Until its destruction in 1730, Nyanaoase was the imperial seat of government, the king's town. It was the largest urban center in the Akwamu state. The earliest description of the city is a brief account of 1688 (Du Casse 1935[1688]:14, translation mine):

> The king [Ansa Sasraku (d. 1689)] lives twelve leagues from the sea; he is one of the greatest rulers of Guinea. The place where he lives is well-policed, and the Frenchmen whom I sent there assured me that they had never seen a place of greater beauty: the streets of the town, which are thirty feet wide, are lined for a distance of three leagues with trees. He has 600 officers at his court and numerous soldiers and much gold.

About 1695 a Dane, Erik Tilleman, visited the *akwamuhene* [king] Basua (1689–1699) at the capital. The city, he reported, was two (Danish) miles long (nearly nine statute miles), but only 160 feet wide. It had one well-aligned main street with houses on both sides. Basua's residence was in the center of the city. Prince Ado, the heir-apparent and co-ruler of the state, lived half a Danish mile (about two statute miles) to the northwest "with many . . . free blacks and their slaves; both the king's and the prince's dwellings stand in the middle of the [main] street and on either side of their residences were the *rade huuse*" (Tilleman 1697:102, 105–106, translation mine). The latter were state buildings: council buildings, courts, stool houses, the treasury, and the shrines of the state deities. The section of the city in which the *rade huuse* were located constituted the government quarter or *abanmu* (Meyerowitz 1951:188; Wilks 1959:43). It formed the nucleus around which the residential structure — the various quarters and suburban settlements — of the capital was organized.

Nyanaoase was the focal point or central place of a populous, urbanized metropolitan district. Within the district, whose exact geographical dimensions are not known, were twenty-two large and small towns (Reindorf 1895:60; Johnson 1964:9–11). Together with Nyanaoase, they could mobilize 7,000 men (Tilleman 1697:106). Around the capital, large royal or state plantations worked by unfree laborers were maintained (Kea 1974:210–212, 218–219). The latter were, for the most part, prisoners of war who, during the course of the seventeenth century, had been resettled in the rural hinterland of the capital. Like Nyanaoase, the other metropolitan towns appear to have had plantations worked by servile labor. These plantations were not royal property, but were held by the "great caboceers' or *abirempon* of Akwamu.[2] By the early eighteenth century, the evidence suggests, a sizable proportion of the labor employed in agriculture in the metropolitan district was unfree (cf. Tilleman 1697:114; Rask 1754:80).[3] This phenomenon is related to the growth of the Nyanaoase political-military establishment after 1650.

The Nyanaoase plantations provisioned the court and probably many of the townspeople as well. They also furnished produce which "was exported to the towns on the coast and was bartered in great quantity for salt and fish; in addition, some foodstuffs were sold for money [cowries and gold] to anyone who cared to buy some" (Tilleman 1697:111, translation mine). The plantations of Nyanaoase and the other metropolitan towns were among the major suppliers of foodstuffs to the European trading establishments and to the ships that traded on the Akwamu coast. Until 1730 Nyanaoase was undoubtedly the main center of commercialized agricultural production within the state.

Nyanaoase was also an important market center. Livestock — cattle, sheep, goats, swine, horses, and fowl — was brought from the states of Little Popo, Whydah, and Ardra (Tilleman 1697:141). Rural farming peoples of the Akwapim scarp took foodstuffs to the capital and purchased tools produced by metropolitan-based blacksmiths. Traders from the coastal towns carried fish, salt, and imported trade goods and bought produce, tools, etc. Craftsmen, cultivators, livestock breeders, fishermen, and salt makers were engaged in commodity production for the metropolitan market. Krobo oral traditions assert that buyers and sellers in the Nyanaoase market did not carry out face-to-face transactions, but engaged in "silent trade" (Huber 1963:57, 62). The implication is that the Nyanaoase market authorities, combining the functions of broker and toll collector, served as intermediaries between them.[4]

[2] In Rask's time, the Akwamu Akan term *abirempon* (sing. *obirempon*), or *abringpung*, was defined as "hero," "a distinguished or great man," "King," "noble," or "lord" (Rask 1754:90, 171).

[3] Around Nyanaoase there were apparently extensive palm-oil and sugarcane plantations (see Kea 1974:210–211).

[4] For a recent analysis of the myth of the silent trade, see Farias (1974).

The development of commodity production and commodity circulation within the metropolitan district was contingent on the demand for livestock, imported wares, gold ornaments, etc.; the demand was directly related to the level of wealth accumulation within the metropolitan district. The forms and level of wealth accumulation were corollaries of the military and political hegemony the Nyanaoase government exercised over its dependencies, on the one hand, and the needs and consumption habits of the Akwamu ruling class, on the other.

The coastal towns and villages belonged to the *akwamuhene* by right of conquest and, from the point of view of the Nyanaoase government, were state property. The king, therefore, had at his disposal an extensive domain which constituted, with respect to the metropolitan district, a dependent "hinterland." The coastal tributaries were divided into fiscal-administrative units or districts. The king distributed them among the *abirempon,* a class of officials which consisted, essentially, of two social groups: the princes and the king's men (Kea 1974:242–251).

The records of the European trading companies (see Kea 1974:428–430 for full references) and various oral histories (e.g., Reindorf 1895, Saxton 1925, Field 1940) contain scattered references to *abirempon* as overlords of the different coastal towns. Between 1703 and 1730 there were from ten to fifteen coastal fiscal-administrative districts. A Danish report of January 1, 1727 (National Archives 1727a, translation mine) has an interesting reference to the appointment by *akwamuhene* Ansa Kwao (1725–1730) of an Akwamu *obirempon,* "the king's most distinguished caboceer," over Osu (Danish Accra):

> Since caboceer Kwaku Kansiang has for a long time been very serviceable toward the fort [i.e., Christiansborg], and continues to be faithful and helpful toward the Company [the Danish West Indies-Guinea company] both with his own person and with his people, whether in disputes or other matters with which he is capable of dealing, and as the king of Akwamu, Ansa Kwao, has ceded to him this town Osu and enfeoffed him as protector over it, Kwaku Kansiang is resolved to take over as the protector of the town.

Kansiang (d. 1729) had been associated with the Danish fort of Christiansborg since at least 1703. Until about 1709 he seems to have been a middle-level official in the Nyanaoase government, a subordinate to a dignitary described as the "king's great caboceer." In that year the *akwamuhene* Akonno (1702–1725) appointed him government broker of Christiansborg (see below), and by 1720 Kansiang occupied the post of the "king's great caboceer." As a reward for his many years of service, he was granted the governorship of the town of Osu. As governor, or protector, he received from the Danes a monthly fee of eight rigsdalers (or half an ounce of gold) and from the town a (?) monthly tribute of

sixteen rigsdalers (or half a *benda*).[5] These payments were made in the form of imported merchandise, salt, and cowries. In addition, both the Danes and the *mantsei* [members of the town council] of Osu regularly presented gifts to him. At an unknown date, but probably during the reign of Akonno, Kansiang was assigned the inland district of Osudoku. His annual income from this district is unknown. In view of his important political position, it is likely that he had jurisdiction over other districts. His duties as protector were commerical, judicial, political, and military.

Other examples of appointments to governorships are known. About 1703 Ansa Kwao, then a prince, was granted the coastal town of Labadi. Around the same period "Bobbi" or "Abobi," perhaps a son of the *akwamuhene* Ansa Sasraku (d. 1689), was assigned the towns of Kpone, Prampram, and "Chabra" (or "Siabra") and the inland district of Shai. Akonno's predecessor Ado (1699–1702) granted Ashabra (or Captain James, as he was known to the Europeans) jurisdiction over the littoral towns of Tema and Great Ningo in 1701 or 1702.[6] A certain "caboceer Hotiaffu" appears to have been the overlord of the town of Teshie in the 1720's. The "great captain" Amo (d. 1731) was responsible for the towns of Dutch (or Little) Accra and Lay and the Lower Volta town of Malfy. "Odday Amonie" (d. 1729), one of the "king's men," had jurisdiction over the twelve to twenty towns on the Akwapim scarp. This system of governorships was the dominant form of imperial administration within the state.

With the exceptions of Amo, who lived in Dutch Accra, and Ashabra, who had houses in Tema and Great Ningo, the *abirempon* resided in the metropolitan district, either in Nyanaoase or in one of the other metropolitan towns. They were an urban aristocracy, and their power and authority were based in the towns in which they lived. Their plantations were located in the metropolitan area, and the large corps of armed retainers which they maintained were also found there. The retainers were the means by which the *abirempon* exercised economic and political control over their respective tributary districts and also formed the military forces that were sent on expeditions and raids into lands beyond Akwamu. A single *obirempon* might have hundreds of retainers at his disposal (Tilleman 1697:113–114; Rask 1754:89, 90). He also had a great number of other dependents: relatives, clients, servants of all kinds, and slaves (cf. Rask, 1754:128, 249–250).

[5] Cowrie shells and gold were the currencies used in the Akwamu state; Danish accounts were kept in rigsdalers. One *benda* = two ounces of gold or thirty-two rigsdalers (see Johnson 1970).

[6] Shai oral history refers to the appointment of "Bobbi" as ruler of the Shai people (Saxton 1925:139–140). According to Tema tradition, Adzeite Ashabra was an early king of Tema (Field 1940:116; see also Reindorf 1895:10, 367.

TAXATION AND FISCAL ADMINISTRATION

Abirempon power was based in part on the fiscal and military authority this class exercised in the various dependent political units and in part on the positions its members held in the central government. The *abirempon* appear, in certain respects, to have been a kind of government aristocracy. Their revenues depended on their connection with the state. As a class they coincided with the military-political structure of the state. From their ranks came the chief army commanders, the principal advisors of the king, the heads of the various departments of government, and the members of the state council, which administered the daily affairs of the empire. With respect to the *abirempon,* the *akwamuhene* was first among equals. Bosman (1967[1705]:64) recognized what appears to have been an institutionalized relationship between the "house" of the king and the "houses" of the "great caboceers": "[The king's] arbitrary despotic power occasions the proverbial saying that there are only two sorts of men in Akwamu, of which the King and his friends are one, and their slaves the other so that he wants no other attendants than those of his own house."[7]

The *abirempon* adhered to the view that one of the main purposes of government was the maintenance of a regular flow of taxes, tribute, fines, etc., from the dependent territories to the metropolitan district. The Nyanaose system of imperial administration led to the accumulation and concentration of vast quantities of material wealth in the metropolitan district (Bosman 1967[1705]:64): "The King and his nobles, or rather favorites, are so very rich in gold and slaves, that I am of the opinion that this country singly possesses greater treasures than all those [Gold Coast countries] we have hitherto described taken together." "The King and his nobles" devoted their revenues, to a great extent, to the maintenance and reproduction of the legal and political conditions which permitted their continued appropriation of the surplus product from the subordinate districts. Commodity circulation, commodity production, and the market commodities depended primarily on the consumption habits of the *abirempon,* their agents, and other dependents, on the one hand, and administrative and other state expenditures, on the other. To a limited extent these conditions generated investment in production, for example, the purchase of slaves, who were employed in agriculture, and of instruments of production. Funds were expended on the upkeep of the roads that linked Nyanaoase and the seaboard towns and to pay the soldiers who policed them. For the most part, however, individual expenditures among the *abirempon* were in great measure directed at the maintenance

[7] For a discussion of the use of the term "house," see Field (1940:1ff.); see also Wilks (1975:329 and n. 7) on the use of the term in an Asante context.

or improvement of their political and social positions within the society.[8]

Towns and villages throughout the empire paid a regular tax or tribute to the Nyanaoase government. Tilleman (1697:107, translation mine), who visited the capital about 1695, reported that the king "receives every year after harvest some of the land's produce from all of those who live in the kingdom, not so much for the value of the produce, but as proof of the submission they owe him." The tax or tribute structure defined the legal-political relation between the rural agrarian communities and the central government. The structure was based upon the cooperative labor of peasant households, the prevailing form of labor organization within the state. However, as we have seen, the agricultural labor of the metropolitan district was to a large extent unfree. There were, thus, two distinct forms of social organization of labor within the agricultural sector of the Akwamu economy, but only one form was incorporated within the tribute structure described by Tilleman.

Unlike the rural communities, the coastal urban centers were required to pay their imposts in the form of merchandise and money (gold and/or cowries) and in some instances in livestock, salt, fish, and locally produced craft goods. Each town, like each village, paid as a corporate unit. The tribute assessment was based on the size of the community concerned. Unfortunately, the available data do not indicate the precise amount paid by each town or the frequency of payment. Danish trading company records suggest that Osu may have paid in the 1720's a (?) monthly tribute in merchandise and cowries equivalent to forty-eight rigsdalers (or one and a half *benda*); Labadi may have paid sixty-four rigsdalers (or two *benda*) a (?) month. In addition to the tribute paid to the officers of the king, each town was obligated to pay tribute to its governor. As we have seen, Osu paid its governor Kwaku Kansiang sixteen rigsdalers (or half a *benda*) a (?) month.

The littoral towns were subject to the imposition of fines and extraordinary levies of diverse kinds and were also required periodically to present gifts to the king, his principal wives, and the leading *abirempon*. In 1709, for instance, the Nyanaoase government imposed fines amounting to more than 15,000 rigsdalers (over 1,000 *benda*) on the towns from Great Ningo to Soko (English Accra) for offenses *contra pacem regis* (National Archives 1711).[9] In 1716 the Accra towns were fined a total of 200 *benda* for failing to send forces to join the Akwamu army in an expedition against the Akyem state. Three years later Ama Kuma, an *abirempon* and rich broker-merchant of Dutch Accra, was accused of having committed adultery with one of the king's wives and fined a sum of

[8] See Hindess and Hirst (1975:79–108) for a theoretical exposition of this point within the conceptual framework of the "ancient mode of production."

[9] For the use of the term *contra pacem regis* in the Akwamu context, see Wilks (1959:66–67).

1,500 *benda* (Wilks 1959:66–68). In February 1728 Osu borrowed goods worth thirty-two rigsdalers (or one *benda*) from the Danes "in order to mourn for the deceased [Akwamu prince] Otting" (National Archives n.d.a).

The metropolitan-based military contingents ensured that the various imposts were paid. Describing the situation at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Bosman (1967[1705]:65) commented that the seaboard towns were "miserably tormented with daily plunderings, or rather robbing visits the Akwamu soldiers make them, they not daring to oppose them in the least for fear the King, who never fails severely to revenge his soldiers' quarrels should hear of it."

A second tax or tribute structure may be said to have existed within the Akwamu state: one based upon the commodity relations which the coastal towns had with the Europeans. The relationship between this structure and commerce is clearly exemplified by the fact that the coastal towns paid their various imposts in the form of imported trade goods and cash. The Danes of Christiansborg frequently lent merchandise and cowries to Labadi and Osu and to the community of "free fishermen" in Osu; occasionally, loans were made to Teshie, Nungwa (Little Ningo), Tubreku (Togbloku), Lay, and Kpone. Many of these loans were used by the towns concerned to pay their tributes, fines, etc., to the Nyanaoase government. The loans were repaid in slaves, firewood, seashells (used to manufacture lime), and cowries.

In July 1719, Odoi Kpoti (d. 1757), ruler of Labadi, borrowed forty-six rigsdalers in spirits and textiles in order to pay a war tax the *akwamuhene* had imposed on all of the tributary districts (National Archives 1719, n.d.b) The debt was to be repaid in seashells. The ruler of Tubreku, "Aichu," borrowed, in October 1723, trade goods to the value of 522 rigsdalers (a little over sixteen *benda*) from the chief merchant of Christiansborg in order to meet his tribute obligations; the loan was to be repaid with seven good male slaves (National Archives n.d.c) In September 1727, Osu and the "free fishermen" of the town borrowed a total of 212 rigsdalers in goods and cowries from the Danes "in order to make a present to the king." At the beginning of the following month Labadi obtained a loan of thirty-four rigsdalers in wares and cowries for the same purpose. Osu was to repay its debt in firewood, the town's fishermen in cowries, and Labadi in seashells (National Archives 1727b). Further examples could be cited for these and other towns. Through different methods of surplus appropriation, the Nyanaoase government was able to dominate and in large measure control the economies of these towns.

The coastal centers, especially those in which European trading establishments were located, were, by virtue of their extensive commercial operations, important centers of wealth accumulation and concentration. Much of this wealth, as we have seen, was appropriated through the

tribute structure. In December 1728, the leading dignitaries of the towns of Accra and Labadi held a meeting at which they expressed their grievances against the heavy exactions of the Nyanaoase administration (National Archives 1728, translation mine).

> Formerly the servants of the Akwamu caboceers imposed great demands on them for no reason. It was resolved that whenever Akwamu caboceers and the king's servants come to any of their towns to demand the payment of a debt, the debtor should without delay, pay immediately. Should an Accra man damage the goods of a king's servant or break his tobacco pipe in half or if any of the Accra man's cattle should damage the royal servant's property, then the Accra man should, for damage amounting to one cloth, pay one cloth, and, for damage amounting to one pipe, one pipe, but for damage caused by his cattle he should pay nothing, and the Akwamu [royal] servant should not be accorded more than this. Other excesses committed among the Accras [and] Labadis either by themselves or by strangers should hereafter be punished as formerly according to the laws of the land. Formerly, whenever an Accra man spoiled an Akwamu [royal] servant's cloths or broke his pipe or cattle damaged his property, he had to pay considerable sums in compensation, and when the Accras went to the king to complain, they did not receive justice. Thus they, together with the mountain peoples [i.e., those living on the Akwapim scarp], have agreed that if the Akwamu king, his servants and caboceers do not accept these conditions, then the Accras and the others will unite to defend themselves. They are willing to serve the king and caboceers as their conquerors, but they are not willing to be treated like their bought slaves.

Control over the circulation of a large proportion of local surplus was clearly in the hands of the *abirempon* and the king.

The European merchant-administrators, soldiers, etc., who resided in the Akwamu ports were also numbered among the tributaries of the state. As a stranger group specializing in trade they had, however, a special status: they were classified as the *akwamuhene*'s "wives." This social classification or definition seems to have meant that the Europeans enjoyed a semiautonomous, but subordinate, position *vis-à-vis* the Nyanaoase government. Their special status did not exempt them from the many financial obligations which tributary peoples were compelled to meet.

Each of the three Accra forts paid one *benda* a month to the *akwamuhene*, a payment often referred to in the documents as "ground rent." It was paid in the form of imported merchandise, cowries, and, occasionally, gold. The Europeans also paid monthly "ground rents" for their lodges. Permission to erect a lodge, several of which were built in various ports along the Akwamu coast between 1699 and 1730, had to be obtained from the *akwamuhene*. The king usually "farmed out" the ground rent for a lodge to the ruler of the town where the lodge was located or to the *obirempon* protector of the town. Between 1702 and 1712 the Dutch paid half an ounce of gold per month to the *obirempon* "Bobbi" for their lodge at Kpone. The Dutch closed it about 1712, but in

the early 1720's the Danes established one there. They paid a monthly ground rent of about a quarter-ounce of gold to Apim, the resident Akwamu ruler of the town, and his son. Apim was not an *obirempon*, but one of several lower-level Akwamu *ahene* (sing. *ohene*) who resided in and ruled over a number of coastal communities (Wilks 1959:63–71; Kea 1974:220–222).

The Europeans were obliged to present, on a regular basis, gifts to the *akwamuhene*, his wives, and some of the leading *abirempon*. These gifts were given for several reasons: to promote trade, to obtain a commercial or political advantage over a rival, and to keep the goodwill of the *akwamuhene* and his administration. The Europeans were also liable for any fines imposed on them by the king. In 1709, for example, the Danes were fined over twenty *benda* in trade goods because they supported the 1708 revolt of Labadi, Osu, Teshie, Nungwa, and other coastal towns. In 1712 the English of James Fort were fined fifteen *benda* in merchandise for failing to pay their ground rent when it was due. In 1726 the Danes paid over fifty *benda* in goods and cowries on the grounds that they had sold, without permission, a gold pawn which the *akwamuhene* Akonno had deposited at Christiansborg. The following year the English were fined a sum of ninety *benda* for having brought a "false palaver" against the Dutch and for having "disturbed the peace of the realm and the state of trade" (Wilks 1959:69, 70–71). The same year the Dutch and the people of Dutch Accra were fined the extraordinary sum of 10,000 *benda* (or 2,000, according to other sources) because of their alleged complicity in the murder of an Akwamu prince (Wilks 1959:71–72).

In addition to rents, fines, gifts, the Europeans were required to make other contributions to the central government. In 1699 the Akwamu ruler Ado sent 300 *benda* (or 3,000, according to another source) in gold, slaves, and imported wares to the Akyem government in order to effect a cessation of hostilities between the two states. The tributary districts were taxed in order to replenish the state treasury from which the sum was drawn. Each of the European forts paid six *benda* in merchandise (National Archives 1700).

The fragmentary nature of the evidence makes it difficult to ascertain the annual value of the merchandise appropriated from the Europeans as rents, fines, etc.; however, it probably ranged from several hundred to a few thousand *benda*. Together with the wealth extracted from the subject towns and villages throughout the state, the yearly revenue of the government must have been very large indeed.

The surplus was channelled into Nyanaoase and the other metropolitan urban centers. It constituted one of the main sources of revenue for the *abirempon*. It has been mentioned above that the *abirempon* used their incomes to maintain and improve their political and social positions; however, their incomes also served another purpose. As officeholders

within the state's political structure, they possessed the means of administration and, in consequence, were obliged to bear the costs of administration out of the tribute, fines, etc., which they received. Each *obirempon* had his own functionaries (or caboceers) and servants who had to be maintained. Part of the appropriated wealth accrued to the king, who utilized it to meet various court, household, and state expenditures. The tributary dependencies were thus the main supporters of the Akwamu imperial or tribute order.

The wealth drawn from the dependent districts represented extensive physical movements of produce, imported trade goods, gold, livestock, craft goods, etc., within the state. These movements did not take the form of commodity circulation; they did not involve commodity relations or commercial transactions. The appropriation and distribution of the surplus occurred through the intervention of politics, that is, through the mechanisms of the political-administrative machinery of the tribute order. This represented one of the two distinct forms of geographical circulation of wealth within the state.

The second form of wealth circulation was commerce. Within the Akwamu context, its expansion was directly related to that of the first. The wealth acumulated in Nyanaoase and the other metropolitan towns was converted to merchant capital when it was used to promote commodity relations with the Europeans and the market centers of neighboring states, or when it was used to develop commodity production within the metropolitan district, or when it was invested in credit transactions. For the king and the *abirempon*, trade was an important "instrument" of state.

PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND PORTS OF TRADE

The main sectors of the coastal economy included farming, livestock breeding, fishing, salt making, hunting, and crafts. These infrastructural activities supported the international and interregional trade in which the ports, the main coastal urban centers, were engaged.

The principal port complex of the state was Accra. It consisted of three distinct towns, each of which had a fort: English Accra (or Soko) and James Fort, Dutch (or Little or Small) Accra and Crèvecoeur Fort, and Danish Accra (or Osu) and Christiansborg Fort. These ports handled the bulk of the overseas trade. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, an estimated fifty to sixty ships visited the Accra towns annually. They provided the forts, a 1727 observer remarked, with "an extraordinary good trade from the inland countries, especially for slaves" (Smith 1744:135). The towns were prosperous and possessed "many cornfields, salt-pans, and other marks of industry" (Atkins 1737:107). The Accra

trading complex had a well-developed (relative to the dominant mode of production) "business structure": capital resources as represented by the many "marks of industry," a sizable and wealthy merchant-broker class, and extensive commercial and shipping contacts.

None of the other Akwamu ports could compete with the Accra towns as commercial centers. Nevertheless, many of them had small European trading posts at various times between 1699 and 1730. They included Shidoe, Labadi, Nungwa, Tema, Great Ningo, Kpone, Lay, Tubreku, Keta, and Aflahu. The coastal towns were the economic and political centers of districts which, on average, extended five to ten miles inland and contained villages, farms, pasture, and the like. The towns were supported in part by the production of their rural hinterlands and in part by the trade in which they were involved. Each of them was ruled by one or more leading "houses," some of which were of Akwamu origin, others of Ga, Adangme, or Ewe origin.

The coastal towns were specialized economic formations. Their internal organization provided the framework necessary for the importation and exportation of commodities. The total value of the trade that passed through the Akwamu ports each year amounted to several thousand *benda.* Textiles of all kinds, metal ware, leather goods, pottery, firearms, gunpowder, spirits, beads, and cowries were among the many imports. The main overseas exports were gold, ivory, and slaves, the latter assuming greater importance as an export after 1700.

The ports were also engaged in an important coastal maritime trade. That of the Accra towns, for example, extended from Axim in the west to Whydah in the east. Textiles and other craft products, agricultural produce, salt, and livestock were the main staples of this trade. It was in the hands of local African merchants and included Europeans among its participants. There existed, too, an overland trade route which ran along the seaboard from Whydah to Axim. The main staples of this trade were gold, livestock, and slaves.

The coastal trade centers maintained close connections with the towns and villages in the interior. In spite of the existence of farms in their immediate hinterlands, nearly all of the Akwamu ports were dependent for their provisions on the agricultural production of inland farms. Reference has already been made to the exportation of produce from the Nyanaoase plantations to the coastal towns. The agrarian communities on the Akwapim scarp also served as food farms for the seaboard populations. Their produce was exchanged for fish, salt, and imported merchandise.

The salt making and fishing industries were also linked to the overseas trade. The Danish priest Rask, who lived in Osu from 1709 to 1714, reported that between December and February forty to fifty Akwamu traders visited the Accra towns daily in order to buy (with cowries or

gold) dried fish and salt. The latter were carried over 100 miles into the interior, where they were exchanged at inland markets for slaves and textiles. Most of the slaves were sold to the Europeans; the textiles were disposed of in the different trading centers of Akwamu (Rask 1754:124–126; cf. Tilleman 1697:110–111).

The commodity relations of the Accra and other coastal towns involved commercial operations that represented distinct yet interconnected trade structures. On the one hand, there was the overseas trade structure of mercantile capitalism, which was represented on the shores of Akwamu by the agents of the European trading companies. On the other hand, the trade structures that linked the Akwamu ports with other Gold and Slave Coast ports and with the inland markets of Akwamu and its neighbors functioned within the framework of "feudal/tributary" and slave modes of production.[10] The merchant representatives of this trade structure were the *abirempon* and those merchants whom the Danes called "wholesale traders."

The Accra forts were wholly dependent on the *abirempon* and the "wholesale traders." In 1730 a Danish factor remarked that the forts had no exports apart from those provided by Akwamu merchants, "for the Accras furnish not the least trade [i.e., for the overseas markets] but live solely on their brokerage [fees] which they can secure from the Akwamu merchants" (National Archives 1730, translation mine). Three years earlier the brokers and town council members of Dutch Accra expressed the extent of their dependence on Akwamu trade: "If the trade routes were closed and the waterhole . . . was occupied by the Akwamu, and all the traders stopped coming down, then they could expect nothing but the complete ruination of their [town], themselves, and their wives and children" (quoted in Wilks 1959:71). In 1707 the chief merchant of Christiansborg, Erik Lygaard, expressed a similar view in one of his reports to Copenhagen. If he failed to send the Akwamu sovereign his customary gift, he wrote, then the king would keep "the peasants or buyers from coming to the fort to purchase their goods; the buyers, who are Akwamu and their subjects, can go to whichever fort they desire in order to obtain whatever they need, but [the king] can close the roads, which imposes the greatest restrictions on trade" (quoted in Kea 1974:207). Akonno closed the trade routes leading to the Accra forts in March 1725. This action meant not only an interdiction on the sale of gold, ivory, and slaves, but also a prohibition on the sale of produce, livestock, salt, etc., to the forts' personnel. The Dutch and English each paid two and a half *benda* in merchandise to have the trade ban lifted; the Danes paid four *benda*. The nine *benda* were distributed among the

[10] For a discussion of these modes of production, see Amin (1973:9–48) and Hindess and Hirst (1975).

soldiers of Amega, a prince and Ashabra's successor, who had closed the routes (National Archives 1725a, 1725b). When the trade routes were closed, the European forts and lodges were not the only victims. The brokers resident in the different ports could also expect, as the Dutch Accra brokers pointed out, "their complete ruination."

The brokerage system of the Accra towns was organized by the Nyanaoase government soon after the destruction of the Accra kingdom in 1681. The government decreed that the Accra caboceers were not allowed to settle more than four miles from the coast, "but they should live under the forts as brokers for the trade which the Akwamu merchants brought to the Europeans" (Rømer 1760:122–123; see also Tilleman 1697:98, 112–113). They were to serve as interpreters and intermediaries between the European factors and the Akwamu and other inland traders, and they were also expected to provide lodgings and storage facilities. Following the completion of each sale the broker received a standard commission of twelve rigsdalers from the factor and the same fee from the local trader (National Archives 1727c). Every broker was also paid a monthly salary or fee by the Europeans in his port. The Accra brokerage system was fully operational by 1687 (National Archives 1687–1689). As a substantial portion of the brokers' incomes derived from the services they rendered, any interdictions on trade could prove financially disastrous to many of them.

The Accra brokers formed one level of what might be termed a brokerage hierarchy. By the late 1680's they had been joined by Akwamu brokers (originally from the metropolitan district) who, like their Accra counterparts, served as commission agents for buyers visiting the European forts. In some of the coastal towns they were resident rulers, local representatives of the Nyanaoase government. In other towns they did not hold political offices. The three Accra forts employed Accra and Akwamu brokers on a full-time basis by the beginning of the eighteenth century. They received monthly salaries and were frequently sent to inland markets as trading agents of the Europeans.

In his capacity as overlord, Ashabra commanded the several hundred Akwamu soldiers garrisoned around Tema and Great Ningo. They represented the military presence of the Nyanaoase government in the area. They policed the local trade routes and, on orders from the capital, closed them. They could thus prevent merchants from east of the Volta (from Keta, Little Popo, etc.) and those traveling down the Volta (e.g., from Kwahu) from bringing slaves, livestock, etc., to the Accra ports. The garrison was also employed to enforce tribute levies and other payments from the towns and villages between Tema and Keta.

The brokerage system of the Akwamu ports was a superstructural institution organized to promote and facilitate the external trade of the state. All of those involved in this trade utilized it. A 1727 Danish account

gives a brief description of one aspect of the external trade structure (National Archives 1727d, translation mine):

> Those who are wholesale traders sell slaves to the Europeans for cowries and other goods, and with these buy slaves far in the interior; the rest of the people and the caboceers gladly buy what they need with cowries and sometimes gold; they purchase spirits, gunpowder, flintlock muskets, tallow, iron, knives, flintstones, *slaplagen*, [etc.].

Generally the "company brokers" served as intermediaries between the Europeans and the wholesale traders, while the brokers in the ports acted as agents for "the rest of the people and the caboceers." Credit transactions formed the basis of the trade between the "wholesale traders" and the European factors. The company or government brokers often stood as surety for the former. They deposited gold ornaments, aggry beads, slaves, etc., in the forts as pawns or security.

On occasion the Nyanaoase government prevented the "wholesale traders" from visiting the Accra forts. A Dutch report of 1706 relates that Akyem traders brought gold and slaves to inland Akwamu markets where the king arranged for his officials to carry them to the forts and lodges on the coast. The king's officers, who negotiated their sales through the agency of the coastal brokerage system, returned to the markets with trade goods and handed them over to the Akyem merchants. The king imposed a duty of 50 percent *ad valorem* or even more on the merchandise (Wilks 1959:74). To avoid restrictions of this sort, the Akyem ruler in 1715, for example, paid the *akwamuhene* 200 *benda* in gold in order to secure a free passage through Akwamu territory for Akyem traders (Kea 1974:227–228). Akyem access to the Akwamu ports was contingent upon the policies and political acts of the Nyanaoase government.

Fante merchants from the port of Anomabu were not subject to any restraints when they traded in Akwamu. A Danish report of 1727 relates that these traders

> have the freedom to go inland into Akwamu and there exchange goods for slaves which they sell to English ships at Anomabu, by which they have caused the price of slaves to be higher than formerly. . . . When the peasants do not have slaves to sell, they can buy various goods from the Fante with cowries which the Fante take to other peasants who have slaves and exchange them for cowries (quoted in Kea 1974:229).

The Fante traders of Anomabu were granted the right of free-trade in Akwamu as a result of the 1715 commercial-political treaty between the governments of Nyanaoase and Anomabu (Kea 1974:229–230, 255).

Akyem, Fante, and other merchants (e.g., Ewe and Kwahu) were active participants in the commercial order of the Akwamu state. Their

operations contributed to the expansion of commodity circulation within the empire and connected Akwamu trading centers with those of neighboring and distant polities. It was within this context — the Akwamu "zone of commerce" — that the trade of the European factors existed as a viable enterprise, but, as has been suggested above, the expansion of the external and internal trade of Akwamu was largely dependent on political determinants within the state.

The mercantile growth of Nyanoase and the other metropolitan towns in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was due in large measure to the intense involvement of the *akwamuhene* and *abirempon* in commerce. A considerable portion of the surplus obtained through the tribute order was converted to merchant capital through the establishment of commodity relations with the European factors and Akyem, Anomabu, and other merchants. The king and the *abirempon* accumulated debts with some of these traders and extended credit to others; at the same time, they sold and bought a wide range of commodities. Notwithstanding the scale of their commercial transactions, the king and the *abirempon* were not professional merchants. Trade, or perhaps more correctly the commercial order, was merely one "instrument" that ensured the political hegemony of the Nyanaoase government.

The brokers of the highest class were those whom the Europeans called "company brokers" or "company caboceers." Each fort had its "company broker." He was invariably an *obirempon* whom the *akwamuhene* assigned to a fort. From the point of view of the Nyanaoase administration, he was the official government broker of the fort. The company or government broker was not necessarily the protector or overlord of the town in which the fort was located. The trading company documents contain numerous references to the "company brokers." Otu Ahiakwa (d. ca. 1711) and his son Amo Nakawa served successively as company brokers of Crèvecoeur and as overlords of Dutch Accra (Wilks 1959). From around 1720 to 1730 the broker of James Fort was the "great caboceer" Kwesi Biri (or Bibiri); however, he does not appear to have been the overlord of Soko. His immediate predecessor might have been "Cobree" or "Cobra" (fl. 1714). In the 1680's and 1690's Asamoni (d. 1703) served as the company broker of Christiansborg. He was succeeded, probably at the beginning of the eighteenth century, by "Dede" or "Dedie." "Dede" held the position until about 1709, when he was replaced by Kwaku Kansiang. (The latter's career we have considered earlier.) All of the company brokers received from their forts regular payments in the form of imported trade goods. With the exceptions of Otu and Amo, all of them lived in the metropolitan district (see Kea 1974:265–274).

The duties of the company brokers were essentially commercial in character. They served as intermediaries between their forts and the

"wholesale traders," and they negotiated sales on behalf of the *akwamuhene* and the *abirempon* of the metropolitan district. They settled conflicts that arose within the broker communities of the Accra towns, and they helped resolve disputes between the king and the Europeans. Within this context, a Danish report of 1702 is of interest for the information it provides on one of the duties of the company broker, in this case the broker of Christiansborg (National Archives 1702, translation mine).

> The Akwamu king summoned to his court the caboceer [probably "Dede"], who is always employed in the king's most important business here at the fort, and admonished him to keep a good watch at this fort [to ensure] that no wrongs or other injustices are committed by any Akwamu, otherwise he will be removed from the position entrusted to him.

The main responsibility of the company or government brokers was to ensure the unimpeded movement of commodities through the Accra ports, in particular those associated with the overseas trade.

In the Akwamu ports east of the Accra towns, there were no forts, only lodges. All ships that traded at the Accra ports did so through the forts and the ports' brokers. Those that traded in the leeward ports did so under the authority of the rulers and brokers of these ports. Between ca. 1702 and ca. 1722, the most powerful ruler on the leeward coast was the *obirempon* Ashabra (Captain James). A publication of 1728 (*Atlas maritimus & commercialis* 1728:90) described how he supervised the ships that traded in his area of jurisdiction:

> [At] a Negro town called Trimine [Tema] lives the famous Negro merchant Captain James; [he] manages all the trade and directs all the ships; he is factor, broker and merchant for all nations; and if the ships act without him they may as well steer without a helm or ride without an anchor; so that they call the Road Capt. James's Bay.
>
> There are many small places places between [Great Ningo and Lay or "Baya"] where the ships go a'slaving . . . and ride generally in the open sea, sending their shallops in to wait the orders of the great Negro James who directs where they shall ride.

Ashabra was the overlord of the towns of Tema and Great Ningo, but not of the intervening towns of Kpone, Prampram, and "Chabra." He served, however, as the government broker for all of the ports between Tema and Lay. The brokers resident in these different places were under his jurisdiction. From each ship he received what was known as "custom," a payment for the right to purchase water, wood, livestock, and produce and to conduct trade in ivory, slaves, and gold. From the English lodge at Tema he received, at regular intervals, gifts. He was the arbiter in all disputes involving Europeans and local brokers and traders, and he was also responsible for directing the inland merchants to the ports where the ships were anchored.

CONCLUSION

A salient feature of the political development of the Akwamu state apparatus during the period under study was the elaboration of a fiscal-administrative system. New political posts, such as the governorships, were created and new forms of taxation were introduced. Political development enabled the state to exercise increased control over external (and internal) trade — the commercial order — and over revenue-paying dependencies — the tribute order. The social basis of this process was rooted in the needs and demands of the Akwamu ruling class, the *abirempon*. Increased control over trade and tributary territories enabled the *abirempon* to appropriate and accumulate greater stores of wealth. Greater wealth meant expanded incomes, and hence an opportunity to trade at the European mercantile establishments on an increasing scale. Larger incomes also provided the *abirempon* with the resources needed to support the state apparatus. The ruling class held a monopoly over the economic means of central administration. However, the political hegemony of this class was destroyed following the revolt of the tributary districts and provinces in 1729 and 1730. The mass uprising of the tribute-paying territories inevitably led to the collapse of the state structure and to the end of *abirempon* rule.

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